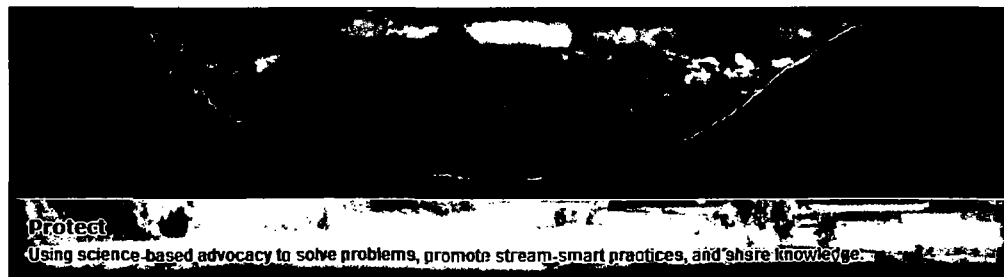


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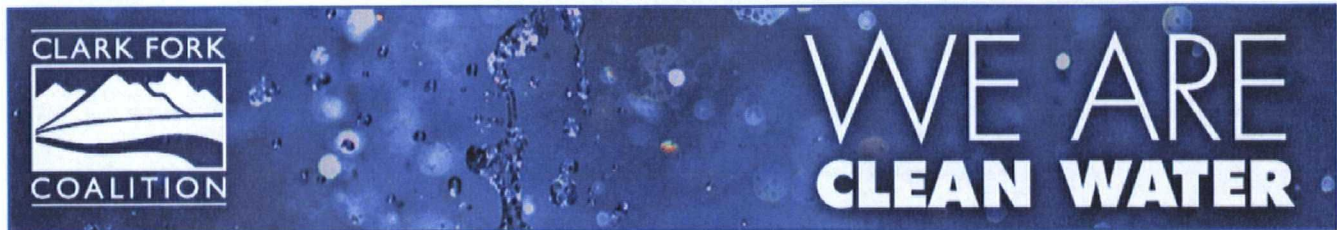
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Cleanup at Smurfit-Stone

[What's next for the Smurfit-Stone property?](#)

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Cleanup at Smurfit-Stone

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But before redevelopment can take place, cleanup of contaminated areas also needs to happen. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took a hard look at the Smurfit-Stone site in summer of 2011 and did preliminary sampling of soil and water. The results of this study – due in spring of 2012 – will determine the location and condition of contaminated areas on the property, and whether or not pollution is migrating off-site.

There are many possible scenarios for the old industrial site. The mill closed down in January 2010 after operating for 53 years as a pulp and paper mill. The plant will never again produce paper because of a non-compete agreement with Smurfit, so the paper-making infrastructure is being demolished and sold for scrap. But with a chipper and boiler still on site, there are other possibilities for light industry, and lots of acreage for a variety of uses, including restoration of wetlands and riparian habitat near the river.



At the Clark Fork Coalition, we think one of the first things GIGI should investigate with respect to cleanup are the 900 acres of wastewater ponds along the banks of the river (*See photo at left courtesy of Peter Nielson with the Missoula Water Quality District*). These ponds potentially pose a huge threat to the Clark Fork, and the area should undergo a thorough evaluation.

Some of the ponds actually sit over what was once the Clark Fork River channel. Old air photos from 1955, taken before the mill was built, show meandering traces of the river flowing through the area where some of the ponds now sit. Now, the only thing standing between these sludge ponds and the Clark Fork is a narrow bulldozed berm, called a levee. In 1997, the levee withstood a 30-year flood-- the biggest since the ponds were built but it's anyone's guess if they'd hold for a larger event. It's natural to wonder: if the levee breached, what would happen to the river? Without a thorough investigation of the wastewater ponds, it's hard to know what the consequences to the river might be if the levee breached.

We also don't know what chemicals and pollutants the ponds might hold from the early days of operations before Smurfit bought the property. Before the wastewater treatment system came online at the mill in the late 1960's, ten years worth of wastewater was simply sluiced into the ponds beside the river. We know that over the years, the plant used a variety of petrochemicals-- likely containing PCBs-- for its operation and maintenance, and we know that it used chlorine in its bleaching plant from the 1960's to 1990's, a bright red flag for the presence of dioxins. These compounds are persistent in soil, toxic to people and wildlife, and accumulate in the food chain. In other words, this is material that we do not want to flush into the river.

Given the age of the Smurfit mill, and the fact that most other defunct paper mill sites have become state or federal Superfund sites, it's critical that we get an accurate sense of the environmental liability of this site. And, ultimately, it needs to be cleaned up to protect fish and wildlife along the river, and to protect all future endeavors on the land, whether industrial, agricultural, recreational, or a mix of all of the above.

For questions on Smurfit-Stone lands, please contact Science Director Chris Brick at chris@clarkfork.org.

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